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FOR NEA/PI

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [KMPI](#) [BA](#)
SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO MEPI SMALL BUSINESS INITIATIVE FOR WOMEN
PROJECT

REF: STATE 115408

¶1. Summary: Reftel requested Post's views on MEPI's proposal to fund a Small Business Initiative for Women (SBIFW) program in Bahrain. Post believes such an initiative could advance economic goals in its Mission Strategic Plan (MSP). We request that MEPI coordinate with Post in the design and implementation of any programs that result from this initiative. End Summary.

¶2. In Post's view, the SBIFW has the potential to strengthen the role of women in business in Bahrain. Although the social and regulatory environments in Bahrain are among the more favorable for women in the region, there is certainly room for improvement. Non-governmental societies such as the Bahrain Business Women's Society (BWS) and Young Entrepreneurs Society provide support for local businesswomen, but need organizational training. While the societies offer business elites an opportunity for regional networking, there remains a public perception that they are inaccessible to the general public. Additionally, explanations of government regulations and requirements related to setting up a small business are not readily available.

¶3. In our view, the three SBIFW programs offered in reftel that would most effectively advance our MSP goal -- "promoting a prosperous economy consistent with the U.S.-Bahrain FTA" are:

a) Training on how to monitor regulatory and other policy proposals affecting women-owned businesses.

At the October MEPI Corporate Ambassador's conference in Bahrain, there was significant discussion of the U.S. Small Business Act of 1953, which requires the USG to set aside five percent of all procurement contracts for small and medium enterprises. The Ministry of Finance, the BWS, and UNIDO-Bahrain all expressed interest in learning more about the U.S. law, and then advocating for a similar law in Bahrain. The BWS, however, has said that it does not know how to proceed.

b) Creation of a reference document library explaining government regulations and requirements to establish a small business.

Information is not readily accessible to potential entrepreneurs, men and women alike, who may be interested in starting up a business. Bahraini entrepreneurs might benefit from facilities like the U.S. Small Business Administration's website [www.sba.gov], which includes online training, and a library of reference materials on marketing, laws and regulations, business planning, and SOPs. Alternatively, this information might be made available as pamphlets and booklets.

c) Industry-specific training.

Existing MEPI programs and GOB training in Bahrain are largely focused on generic management courses, such as marketing or accounting. Businesswomen have repeatedly voiced an interest in more specialized training.

HENZEL